

Miller reflects on growing up in Camas

By SANDRA WALTERS
The Post-Record

She was born in 1907 in a house her father built, learned how to drive a car after she got married in 1927 and was the first queen of Camas Days.

Fae Miller, who will turn 86 in June, has lived in Camas all her life or as she said, "I can say I've lived here all my life, but I haven't lived all my life, yet."

Her father, Henry Starks, worked in the Crown Zellerbach Mill while her mother, Alma, raised the family's children, Fae and her older brother and sister, Maye and Elra.

Miller said ever since she can remember she has been a member of the First Christian Church of Camas.

"My mother and aunt, with several other families, helped organize the church, and my two uncles helped build it in the early 1900s," she said. "The congregation used to be a lot larger in the early days than it is now."

When the family moved up onto Prune Hill, Miller walked to school each day. The school house was located in the same general location as Helen Baller is today.

"There was a building for grades first through seventh and then the high school was for eighth through 12th," she said.

Miller graduated from Camas High School in 1926.

"I wanted to leave Camas after I graduated from high school and travel," she said. "However, I got talked out of it and got married instead."

It was after she got married that she first learned how to drive a automobile.

"I was thrilled when I learned to drive," she said. "I had walked to school for all those years and now I could just go anywhere I wanted faster. The first car I learned to drive was a Whippet. It was a little manual car with a rumble seat, although it was sometimes called the mother-in-law seat. It was a good little car."

As time passed on, Miller and her husband, Earl, a carpenter who died in 1989, began a family and had three children. Her oldest son, Keith, died two years ago of cancer and her other two children, Maxine and Ambrose lives in Camas and Jim lives in Salem.

When her children got out of school, Miller went to work at the Camas J.C. Penney Store and earned 38 cents an hour.



FAE MILLER

"I can say I've lived here all my life, but I haven't lived all my life, yet."

"When I first started in the late 30s or early 40s I made 38 cents an hour and thought that was good money," she said.

Miller said she found an old pay stub of her father's when he worked in the mill in the 1930s. The pay stub showed that he worked 60 hours one time at 62.5 cents an hour and took home \$35.57. His deductions from the check included \$1.89 for insurance and 9 cents to medical aid.

Along with the change of wages at the mill today, Miller said there are other changes that have happened to Camas during her 85 years.

"When my dad used to work at the mill when I was a child, I used to walk right in and see him anytime I wanted," she said. "That doesn't happen anymore. The mill was the focal point of the town. My brother even worked there when he got older."

Another change has been the growth of schools in Camas.

"They've built more schools because of so many people moving in the area," she said.

Miller said three generations of her family have graduated from the Camas School District.

"My husband and myself, my children and two of my grandchildren have all graduated from Camas," she said with a smile.

One change Miller would still like to see happen in Camas is the construction of a place for youth to



go and a retirement home for seniors.

"The young people need a place to go and there isn't one for them," she said. "People my age are having to go to Vancouver to live in a retirement home because there isn't one around here. I'd have to have to leave Camas. If there was one here, it would sure fill up fast because people would stop going to Vancouver."

One of the highlights of Miller's life was when she and her husband were crowned the first queen and king of Camas Days in 1981.

"I was surprised we were nominated," she said. "When I learned we were the first king and queen I was flabbergasted."

Just recently, Miller fulfilled two of the things she wanted to do in her lifetime, take a cruise and fly in a helicopter.

"I went on a cruise to Mexico with a group of people from the Washougal Senior Center and rode in a helicopter around the Camas area," she said. "They were both just plain fun. People ask me now if I'm going to go bungee jumping. No way."



THIS PICTURE (top right), taken in either 1908 or 1909, shows Miller being held by her mother, Alma Starks, and her older brother, Elra, and sister, Maye, standing on the front porch of the family home, built by Miller's father, Henry. Miller (right) is shown in her high school graduation picture in 1926. She graduated from Camas High School.



MILLER AND her husband, Earl, were the first king and queen of Camas Days. The couple (above) are seen taking part in the parade in 1981. Miller said she and her husband were both surprised at being selected as Camas' first king and queen. After years of walking from her home on Prune Hill to school, located in the same area as Helen Baller, Miller finally learned to drive on a car called the Whippet after getting married in 1927. Miller and Earl (bottom right) are seen sitting in their little rambler. Although she doesn't like to drive at night, Miller continues to drive during the day. (Photos courtesy of Fae Miller)

